

Linda Clair
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File 5b – Wednesday morning discussion session

Question: This morning I said something and I just completely cracked open. It was as simple as: is it as simple as it is? In working in the world, especially in the arts when things can be totally judgmental, how on earth do we apply, “it is as it is?” How does that work when there’s always those moments when you wish things to be better and improve somehow? And there are those moments when you go, “Okay, it may never be better than it is,” there’s still judgment implied. It also feeds into one’s basic upbringing where we’re taught to judge because we’re judged, not out of anybody’s maliciousness particularly. We’re taught to judge and we then judge ourselves and we learn to judge others. And in doing so we push people away from ourselves, like what you were saying to A. yesterday. When people are coming towards you or you’re in a working environment I know there are lots of ways to handle that but none the less, if you’ve got that stuff underneath you. It’s probably a bi-fold question. How do you handle, “it is as it is,” and make it a living truth for yourself given all this other stuff that goes on in the world?

Linda: But it’s not other stuff, it’s the same stuff, it’s all the same. You’re separating it but it’s all the same. By doing what you’re doing – keep doing it. You’ve got a practice at home? (Yes.) It’s very, very difficult but try not to regret things. And that takes a long time to do. You do something and then you go, “Ah, I shouldn’t have said that. I should have said something else. I could have done it better.” You’ve got to see that and then apply this practice, just come back to your body, “Okay, I did what I did.” Of course your mind will keep coming up going, “Oh!...” whatever, judging yourself.

You just have to accept everything. And that’s the deepest teaching I ever got: accept everything. And if you apply that to every little thing you can see how little you accept it. And just by seeing it, it does help you to accept it.

Of course there are things that I’ve done in my life that I won’t repeat, hopefully I won’t. But you have to say, “I did the best that I could at that time,” and not get into guilt, or, “I could have done it better.” If you feel like you could have done it better, do it better now. But don’t go back and say, “I wish I hadn’t done that,” or, “I wish I hadn’t said that.” When you look closely at how often you do that in your life with little mundane things, “Ah, I shouldn’t have eaten... Ah, I should have done this. I shouldn’t have said this.” Just look at that, the little things. They compound into the seemingly bigger things but they’re not as big as you think.

Question: Also, I’ve seen where I don’t know where my perspective is on this because it’s so ingrained in me, the self-judgement or just judgment.

Linda: And it was in me and it is in almost every human being. We’re taught to be judgmental.

Question: I'm working with people and heard it so many times, "Well, it is as it is," and it means that person's told to F off basically or they're not going to put any more effort into it. I don't know if that's my judgment but when I hear that expression I go, "Ohhh."

Linda: What I mean is, don't regret anything but it doesn't mean that you don't put more effort into not repeating. It's not like you just give up. It's accepting and going, "Well, I did what I could at that time."

Question: If I get stuck in that whirlpool, I give up.

Linda: Yes, so it's not about giving up. It's about using it to put more effort into not repeating maybe or doing something fresh and new. But don't waste your energy regretting things. It's just a total waste of energy: regret, guilt. We've all done things that we wouldn't repeat. So everyone's in the same boat. But what's the point of going over that again. You learn from your experience and you don't repeat it, you make the effort not to, but you've learned from something that you've done. Then you don't see things as mistakes.

Question: It's funny, for some things that's fine, and there's other things that are just...

Linda: No, everything is fine. You can't separate and say there are other things that...

Question: Oh, I just meant in my behaviour in the world.

Linda: Everything though – everything!

Question: Even my behaviour?

Linda: Yes! Particularly your behaviour because there's always a "but," because, "Oh but, I'm different. I'm special. My behaviour's worse or better, whatever. My life is worse. I've had more trauma than this person so it's harder for me." You can get into that again, and again, and again. So, don't regret. But it's easy to say that. But see each time you start to see that in little things.

Question: The big one was being given two bits of wood and volunteering to hit them in time (for chanting the Hearth Sutra.) (laughing) That's what sparked it off because immediately there was a judgment, "Oh, that sounded horrible," and then the whole monkey on my back that I've learned for years in professional performance came on my head and went around and around. Nothing happened until you said, "It is as it is, accept the sound," and it blew me away.

Linda: And it was nice and loud. (laughing)

Question: Transforming, I dare say for the people near me. (laughter)

Linda: So when I said, "No, turn it down a little bit," it wasn't a judgment there, it was just, "It's a bit loud, turn it down." It doesn't mean...

Question: Yes, yes. It's just that at the back I couldn't see you.

Linda: You look a bit better, starting to look a bit more normal.

Question: It's becoming more clear, my relationship with my mind and time. I've basically been in this relationship with a time dealer. (laughing) And it's really got no business being here.

Linda: What has no business?

Question: My mind, or my relationship to it that takes me out of being here. Everything in my life has been based around this subconscious addiction I've had to the time and stories and the past. And all of my relationships with other people, it's almost like I've been taking a detour through my mind to be in relationship with other people. It's had me for a long time and I haven't seen it so clearly before. I've been gradually seeing it more and more.

Linda: And you're doing something about it by being here.

Question: Yes, by being here I'm practicing breaking that relationship and I'm coming into relationship with what's here.

Linda: Well, it's seeing how much you've allowed yourself to be controlled by the mind. We're not trying to annihilate but just seeing how toxic that relationship is and doing something about it by becoming clearer and stronger, and seeing how all your relationships are really based on the past. It's all you need to do, see that and come back to now.

Question: When you speak about acceptance, part of it is accepting that that's how it has been. I don't feel as guilty, or regret, as much as I have in the past. Just to accept that but say, "No, I don't want any more of that anymore." I want to be here.

Linda: Good.

Question: It takes a lot of strength and determination to do that.

Linda: Yes, but it's possible. So the thing is not to say, "My past is more special than anyone else's, my mind is worse than anyone else's."

Question: I just feel so lucky, grateful, that we can just sit here and ask anything. My intention this retreat was to strengthen my practice. And sometimes when it's been just everything, the big catastrophe, I could hear you saying it's worth it, persevere, "I would have put more into it, just for a minute of this." What opened up was that this teaching that you give us is so precious in a way. We don't have to write a question and get it selected and wait – you're here!. (laughter) I can say my shoulder's hurting, or anything. I hope I never take it for granted. I saw how you were with your teacher and it showed me a lot about being a student, because it's easy for me to come retreats and forget that I'm a student, and feel, "How can I make myself more comfortable? How can I get this and that?"

Linda: Thanks.

Question: The last couple of days have been a lot of hard work but really encouraging, from what you had spoken of a couple of days ago about almost longing for the intensity of pain to feel that aliveness. I feel the last couple of days I've really been working on not having a relationship to that,

but really being in the body with pain, and coming back to the breath. It's been a real sense of – it's hard to explain – I just feel more determined to move through and be with things.

Linda: And it's great that your energy has been freed up to do that.

Question: It does, it feels really quite different. I've actually stopped counting for the first time in two and a half years. I'm experimenting with not counting.

Linda: Yes, it's good to do that.

Question: Yes, but I haven't been able to really not count because my mind has been so intense. It's the only thing that pulls me back. But now I'm in my body in a way that I can trust just being in the body, and whatever comes up with the body is okay. It gets really, really intense. I've been working on building my capacity for pain.

Linda: That's great. I also want to remind everyone that eventually you feel that incredible intensity and aliveness without needing to feel that pain. You're just so in your body that there's no need to feel that pain any more.

Question: I really take on the usefulness of the pain.

Linda: It's very, very useful.

Question: And just a lot of sensations, and the changing nature of those sensations even if the pain is constant, like with the sit bones after a long sit. But it's about really staying with that and then noticing how thinking is wanting to form a relationship of, "This is mine, and I've got a story about why I can't do this anymore," but then pushing against that.

Linda: Well rationally, looking at this whole thing, it looks mad. And if you try and explain it to anyone else it just sounds crazy, so it's better not to. But you do start to use your sensations in a totally different way. It's not this, "I want to use all my sensation to get as much pleasure as possible and avoid pain as much as possible." So the way you use your sensations does change quite dramatically. Vision – you're not always seeking out something you want. There's not all this judgment associated with things, like you look at someone and you go, "Ah, they look nice. Oh, they look horrible. Oh, that's my type of person," and all that stuff. Almost all that goes. You feel so much more at ease and you're not using all this energy judging. You're just walking around looking at things. That's all – just looking. Hearing things.

Question: Yesterday I had a very strong day of the mind coming in with a lot about not being good enough – very old patterns. So really determinately having to sit through and keep coming back to, "That's not what's happening." Thanks. I keep having these moments of, "Oh god, we've only got three and a half days left! Wow, this is so precious, it's so important."

Linda: Some people are probably thinking the opposite. (laughter) "Oh my god, I've three days left."

Question: Relatively recently I've been realising that all my activity, all my life, has been to run away from pain and sorrow. I hadn't realised that's what I was doing. And that's why this work has been very hard for me. You keep saying, "Keep still, don't move," and that's the one thing I want to do. I

remember at school I *hated* sitting in school. Sitting still, I'd really want to be out and about or doing something else. So this sitting is not what I really like. (laughing) But this last week I realised that if I sit very still then the pain is not so bad. And if I tense up with the thought of movement, it gets worse. So that's something I've learned. I'm getting closer to being able to sit still with the pain when it comes.

Linda: Good, very good. But I wouldn't say you've spent all your life trying to avoid your pain because you've been doing this for quite a while. (Yes, ten years.) So you have to acknowledge that you have been doing something, you have been working. You haven't spent your whole time avoiding or running away from pain because you have been doing this quite a while.

Question: Yes, I've tried. It's done some good too, I know it has. I've changed quite a bit.

Linda: Yes, you have. You used to be quite... (laughing) I'm not sure what the word is. (Aggressive?) A little bit at times. No, I don't know if I'd say aggressive, opinionated maybe.

Question: Yes, I have a lot of opinions. Well, I'm giving them up now.

Linda: Yes, give them up.

Question: Anyway, thank you for being patient with me.

Linda: It's been a pleasure.

Question: I'm a bit nervous. I don't know why. (laughing)

Linda: So what's happening today, what's been happening?

Question: Something you said this morning really resonated with me. It made my sit one of the best I've ever had. I should preface by saying this could be B.S.. I don't know if it actually happened or if I'm making it up. (laughing) It felt like I wasn't seeking out the sounds, I wasn't actively listening for them. But once I started hearing them, I could hear so much. Not to the point of overwhelming but it was incredible what I could actually hear. And on top of that, it wasn't particular sounds, it was like there were no agent. It was just sounds appearing in consciousness, and disappearing or changing just as quickly.

Linda: Very good.

Question: Yes, it was really weird. Anyway, I found that the breath really grounded me. It became an anchor literally, if it wasn't there I would kind of float away or dissipate. But at the same time I finally understood what it means when someone says the self is an illusion. It was like I wasn't there – it was so strange. It was like I didn't exist at all.

Linda: But you didn't feel spacey, you felt very grounded?

Question: Yes, it was like I was there but wasn't, at the same time. I still had thoughts coming and I realised impermanence is a universal thing so this state is going to end eventually, and I think the thoughts ended that sooner than later. I'm not saying that's a bad thing but it felt like the thoughts

were bringing me back into my body. And I know that's something we're trying to do, really feel yourself in your body. But it felt like I didn't want to do that because I've just realised that I am not my body, I am nothing. So I'm struggling with where to go now. (laughing) It feels like I don't want to be in my body.

Linda: You're going to have to be really firm and come back. When something like that happens you can get overwhelmed by it, and blown away and go over it and over it. It's good that you're talking about it now. So next sit, let it go. Try and let it go and just come back to the basic simple practice, coming back to the breath.

Don't repeat anything. So don't try and repeat that experience. Although it was really profound it was still and experience because it came and went. So there will be a deep resistance, especially after something like that, to come back into your body because you just want to be free of that attachment – it's not free of your body but free of the attachment to it. And you had a slight glimpse of that.

I'd say you're going to have to be really firm and come into your body, even though you might not want to. And it might be difficult the next sit. You might have lots of thinking and stuff happening, a bit of pain, and you won't want to do that, but you need to persist.

Question: Yes, with the latter part of the sit I had to sit in the chair.

Linda: Yes, it's really difficult when something like that happens because there's this huge reaction to it and all you want to do is repeat it and keep feeling it. But the thing to do is to accept that yes, it was probably more real than anything you've ever felt, but there's still a lot of work to do. So you need to keep working away because, particularly after something like that, your mind can come in more strongly than ever and try and destabilise you. And that's what the grounding and the breath is all about, "No, I'll stay here and come back." So try not to expect anything next sit. I can't say how it will be. It might be strong or it might not but you don't know. So try to go into it as openly as possible, not expecting anything in particular. So good.

Question: I just have a couple of things to clarify. You said when you were guiding the meditation this morning about not focusing on the breath, but using it as an anchor?

Linda: If you home in on the breath and all your attention is there, a little bit of fear is going to creep in because you're going to attach to it, and not hear or notice other things that are happening because you're just homed in on this one thing. So attention on the breath isn't to try to avoid anything. We can tend to try and use it like that so that we block everything else out. It's anchoring you, it's like your home base and coming back again and again, but noticing the big picture as well. If you focus on anything it implies that you're not aware of other stuff around.

Question: So when you come back to that anchor, the breath and body, should you also be listening to or hearing sounds?

Linda: If you can, yes. So hear that sounds.

Question: Good, because I found that quite good this morning.

Linda: Yes, use the sounds. As L. was saying too, there's this, this, this, this. It makes you much stronger. When you focus on something it's sort of a false sense of concentration. You can think you're somewhere that you're not really, because you're not open to everything else around. But if you can be aware of all that and sensations in the body and use the breath as an anchor, it makes the whole thing much more balanced and there's not that degree of attachment or fear.

An attachment implies a bit fear that, "Oh, if I let myself hear this sound it's going to disturb my meditation. If this happens it might disturb me." It's just a way of really anchoring yourself a bit more in your body and using it, as I said, as an anchor and help stabilise, but being open to everything else – and it can help. The way you use your sensations, such as hearing and seeing, everything starts to change. And you do hear things that you never heard before. Because you're so busy thinking and focusing on thinking and your own personal drama, you miss so much. So when that goes, it's incredible what you can hear and see and feel.

And when you're talking with someone you feel them, you really feel them with your body. You feel what they're saying rather than the words. You feel what's behind the words when there's not all this other stuff going on.

Question: The first few days the intensity of the mind was really strong. It was very hard to come back to that anchor, and it was tiring. And heat builds up and the body becomes very uncomfortable throughout and I have to move almost.

Linda: Because of the heat?

Question: Yes, like a prickly heat, and so uncomfortable. At the same time tension builds up, particularly in my head, and becomes almost unbearable. It feels like it's keeping me out of my body. You've always said the opposite to that but I almost can't come back. I'm having trouble feeling any part of my body.

Linda: But you're feeling that intense heat and the stuff in your head and the tension.

Question: Yes, I don't know, it's sort of in a cloud. I guess it's happening in the body but it's just all around me. But it feels concentrated up here in the head. So I feel at an impasse, like I'm stuck and can't move out of that state until the bell.

Linda: Yes, don't try and move, just put up with it. It's *almost* unbearable but not quite unbearable, but it almost is. So I'd say do the walking. I know particularly when it's in your head it's really, really strong. Yes, just keep going, but don't try and push through it. So sit for the half hour, do the walking, sit for another half an hour. Don't feel that you should be sitting longer or that you should be able to sit for longer.

Linda: Does this retreat feel different to other ones?

Question: I haven't done one for a while. That pattern of build-up of tension and pressure is familiar, it happens a lot. I tend to want to try and get through it in some way, do something about it.

Linda: I'd say look at that, look at wanting to do something about it. Just do your best to put up with it. You are doing something about it by being but that's enough. So don't try and push through it. Really watch as closely as you can your wanting to do something with it or to it or get rid. Of course you don't want to feel that forever, but right now that's what you're feeling.